

A writer's guide to volleyball

You want to be a sportswriter, don't ya?

Don't lie. You've read a few stories on your way to the crossword puzzle, and you're sure you can do better.

So what do you say? Start out the easy way. You can handle the volleyball beat.

Don't worry, it's not as frightening as it sounds.

But they're No. 1 aren't they? Exactly, that's what makes them so easy to report on.

See, every match is usually over in under 90 minutes, it's free and when you see free food sitting in the press room, your grin will widen.

Just make sure you wipe the chocolate off your lips before you interview Coach John Cook.

And you don't need to be creative to apply.

Every story you will write about the volleyball team is the same because every match is the same at good ol' Nebraska U.

Here, let's practice. First, let's start with a lead sentence, which will tell everyone exactly how easily Nebraska won the game.

It's got to be snappy with lots of destruction involved. Nebraska volleyball rolled over, flattened, crushed, slaughtered, flogged, demolished, trampled over, hammered, blew out or, for you rated-R fans, killed (Insert name of defeated opposition here.) in three games Saturday night at the NU Coliseum.

If some act of God actually happens to make the match go longer than three games, you can call for backup, and someone will cautiously walk you through a four- or five-game story.

And you might as well try to entertain the reader, because the match likely wasn't a Frazier-Ali Classic Sports Network Confrontation.

So after your lead, say something like: (Insert defeated opposition here.) was as much competition on this night to the Huskers as (Insert a sorority intramural volleyball team here.)

Now you're off and rolling. Throw in a few stats about kills and blocks, and definitely learn how to spell Pilakowski.

When in doubt, there's always a Pilakowski stat. Meanwhile, Coach Cook will try his darndest to vary his quotes, but what can he really say to entertain after a blowout?

"Gee golly, we won in three games again. One game at a time ya know."

For the real meat of your story, throw in an exasperated opposing coaches' quote.

"We ... we ... we ... just couldn't match up," as their lips quiver, and they break down crying.

Just smile and nod politely at the opposing coach. He or she doesn't have to know what you knew. You knew the opposition was just another 90-minute exercise, while the coach did not.

Finally you talk to the Nebraska players, and they will use phrases like chemistry, coming together as a team and still needs improvement.

Occasionally you can trick these girls into talking about the Final Four or National Championship, but they will eventually catch your sly ways and say, "But we take things one game at a time ..."

But you tried, and that's 10 gold stars to you.

Now, just type in an opposing coach's quote about how Nebraska and the Olympic team are about even in talent and hand that story in.

Now, let's say the stars align in a certain manner, and Nebraska loses a match.

Um ... Code red. I'm bailing. You're on your lonesome now.



Brian Christopherson

Missouri bowed by tough early schedule

BY DAVID DIEHL

Missouri football Coach Larry Smith doesn't beat around the bush when discussing his team's first three games.

"Well," Smith said, "we sure haven't gotten any false sense of security."

Missouri's non-conference schedule left the Tigers with a sour taste in their mouths and just one win, a season-opening 50-20 win vs. Western Illinois.

Now, following a blowout loss at Clemson and fourth-quarter heart-breaker vs. Michigan State, MU isn't exactly sitting pretty after its first three games.

When MU comes calling to Lincoln on Saturday, it will be the third straight week that the Tigers tackle an opponent ranked in the top 15. Clemson and Michigan State are ranked No. 8 and 15 respectively, and now MU comes to No. 1 Nebraska.

But Smith is holding his chin high after the first three games and entering his toughest contest to date.

"This is what the schedule makers handed us, and that's what were playing," he said. "The situation we're in is we're 1-2 and we're trying to make it 2-2."

That may be easier said than done. When played in Lincoln, Nebraska leads the series with MU, 29-14-1. Missouri hasn't won in Lincoln since a 35-31 win in 1978 and has lost every game to the Cornhuskers since then.

But playing NU right after two other ranked opponents doesn't deserve any extra credit or attention being thrown in Missouri's direction, Smith said.

"I don't sit down and worry about those things," Smith said. "We have a very tough first four games. Now were finding out that Western Illinois is a very fine team. I don't

expect any more credit because, really, the bottom line is when you have 11 opportunities, how many do you win."

Missouri came close to winning vs. Michigan State. They held a 10-point lead in the first half and were tied going into the fourth quarter, but a field goal early in the final period did in the Tigers.

"(This start) taught us a lot about our team," said senior offensive tackle Joe Glauberman. "Even though we've been losing, we've stuck together, and we know we have the ability to be a good team. I think we've done well through the losses."

Those losses, along with that schedule that Missouri is playing early on this year, helps the team progress, Smith said. Progress was evident in the practices between the 62-9 blowout at Clemson and the tight game his team played against MSU, he said.

"This is what the schedule makers handed us, and that's what were playing. The situation we're in is we're 1-2, and we're trying to make it 2-2."

Larry Smith
Missouri football coach

"If you don't play those games at all, you can go into the really tough games with a false sense of how good you might really be," Smith said.

"But as a coach and as a team, you'd still like to be going into a game like this at 3-0."

On an island Keyou Craver is by himself this year

Keyou Craver said he is unsatisfied with his career so far at Nebraska.

In fact, the Harleton, Texas, native said he has barely even scratched the surface.

"I haven't done nearly what I can," he said. "Until I leave, that is what I will dwell on."

Whether he chooses to believe it, many are quite satisfied with what Craver has done in his three years in Lincoln.

"He has held up his end of the bargain well," said secondary coach George Darlington.

And many think this is the year that the left cornerback breaks out. Craver has been in the shadows most of his career at NU, playing behind Erwin Swiney as a freshman and then alongside Ralph Brown as a sophomore.

The junior said he is grateful to both players for showing him the ropes. He does not dwell on his time spent on the sidelines and out of the spotlight.

"I knew that I had to pay my dues just like everybody else," Craver said. "I knew it would be only a matter of time before I could show what I could do."

Craver has shown what he could do from first time he was tested as a freshman.

"The day we tested out, with all of these guys coming in that were Parade All Americans and me, coming from a small town of 800 people; I think I surprised a lot of people," Craver said.

From then on, coaches and critics

have been impressed.

As a freshman, he recorded 25 tackles, three pass breakups and one of the most memorable games of his career - Kansas State.

Against the Wildcats he earned his blackshirt after he intercepted Michael Bishop for only the second time of the 1998 season.

"It was my first career interception, and my family got to see me on television, and that was real cool," he said.

Things only got better as there was no sophomore slump for Craver who stepped into a starting role vacated by Swiney, who was injured. He totaled 51 tackles last season along with 12 pass breakups and three interceptions.

Craver also has made his mark on special teams, blocking two punts and as a member of the punt-return team.

The four-time triple-jump state champion said he took what he could get in his first two years.

"I was just blessed to play as early as I did, regardless of whether I started or not," Craver said.

But now it is his time to shine - without the shadow of Brown, who no longer mans the opposite corner. Swiney now holds that position, but Craver has shown Big 12 offensive coordinators he is capable of holding his own.

Craver learned about taking care of himself last season, when opposing quarterbacks often threw his way because of Brown's presence on the field.

Darlington said his star corner made

leaps and bounds last season because of his situation and because of Brown.

"Any time that players can learn from the older players by watching them is very important," he said. "It is very important to emulate players who are successful and done well."

Defensive Coordinator Craig Bohl said he has seen confidence build in the former high school running back.

Craver agreed that is one area he was lacking his first season.

"I didn't come in with as much confidence as I should have," Craver said.

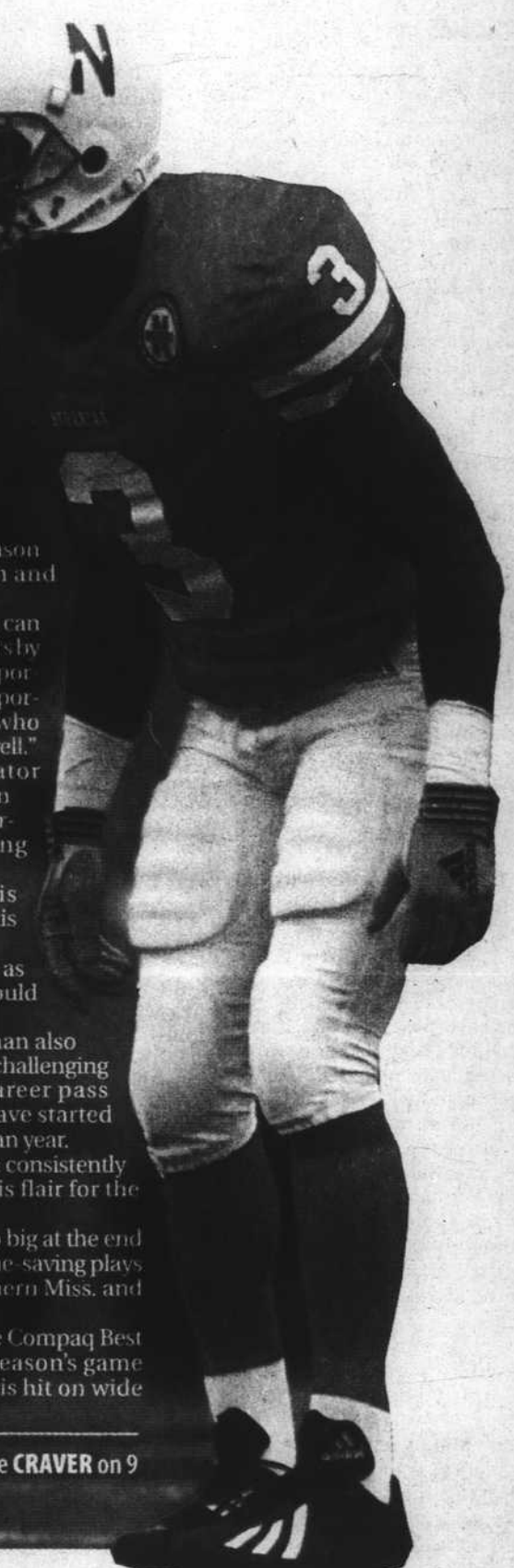
The first-year head man also said he could see Craver challenging Brown's record of 50 career pass break-ups if he would have started like Brown did his freshman year.

While Craver has been consistently solid against the pass, his flair for the dramatic has stood out.

Craver has stepped up big at the end of big games, making game-saving plays last season against Southern Miss. and Kansas.

Craver also earned the Compaq Best Hit of the Week in last season's game against Texas A&M for his hit on wide receiver Chris Cole.

Please see **CRAVER** on 9



Colorado looks to challenge NU

■ So far no Big 12 team has been able to hang with NU, who has won all four matches in straight sets.

BY SEAN CALLAHAN

Nebraska Volleyball Coach John Cook likes to believe every team is going to present a challenge in the Big 12.

Thus far, that hasn't happened. The Cornhuskers have literally embarrassed every Big 12 foe they've faced this season.

Tonight, the top-ranked Huskers (11-0, 4-0) travel to Boulder to tangle with what Cook calls an improved Colorado squad (5-5, 1-2).

And Cook, like he has for every conference game, expects a challenge from the Buffaloes.

"Colorado plays typical Colorado volleyball," Cook said. "They play great defense, side out and you have to go up there and play up in an altitude which presents a challenge for us."

Playing around a mile above sea level may be a factor for the Huskers in tonight's match.

Cook said the altitude could alter NU's approach against Colorado.

"When you play at altitude it's harder to stand back and serve tough because the ball carries more," Cook said. "The altitude kind of neutralizes our serving."

"We're going to have to be exceptional blocking and defensively to win."

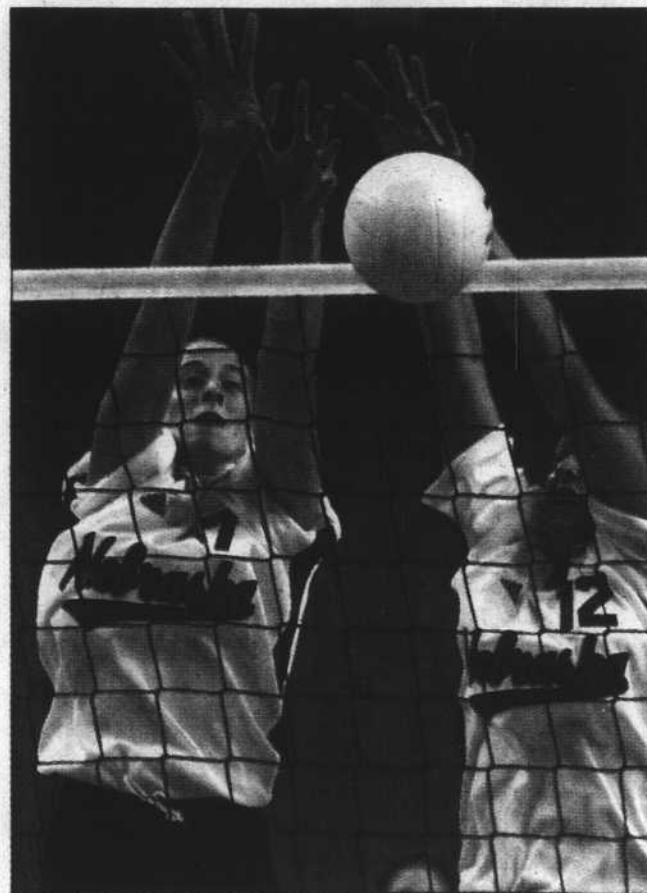
One of the defenders Cook said he expects a big game from is sophomore Lindsay Wischmeier.

The defensive specialist split time at setter last year with senior Jill McWilliams.

With sophomore Greichaly Cepero currently handling the duties at setter, Wischmeier was expected to take on her new, less-glorifying role of defensive specialist.

She said most people don't enjoy playing the position, but it's something she knows this team needs in order to succeed.

"It's a different role," Wischmeier said. "It's a challenging role. You're really expected to dig everything up, and some minor things you have to concentrate on are a lot different then setting."



Tonight, Colorado will have to face a Husker blocking attack that is regarded as one of the best in the nation.

"Everyone knows you can't have a kill without a pass or a dig. Whether you get media attention or not, I don't care. As long as I'm helping the team I'm happy."

Thomas busts out on and off field for NU

BY JOHN GASKINS

After chatting with Nebraska rush end Benard Thomas for all of about three seconds, it's pretty easy to figure out how he has busted out of his redshirt and onto the field three games into his true freshman season.

It's also easy to figure out why he might bust into a black-shirt a lot sooner than most Husker defenders do.

With Thomas, after the ball is snapped or right as he opens his mouth, the floodgates open with a fury, much like his career at NU has.

There's little holding back. "Nebraska loves football like I love football," Thomas said when asked why he chose the Huskers over other powers Notre Dame, Virginia, USC and Arizona.

"It's smash mouth, straight to the point, we're going to break your back, have you crying, have you wetting your

"(NU football is) smash mouth, straight to the point, ... and you're going to go crying to your momma talking about how you don't want to play football anymore."

Benard Thomas
NU rush end

Please see **THOMAS** on 9